

FEDORA – THE VOICE FOR OXSHOTT CIC

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND (LGBCE) FOR SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL (SCC)

Introduction

1. FEDORA has given careful consideration to the recommendations from LGBCE. It has consulted local SCC councillors as well as local borough councillors from Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC). FEDORA has provided notification of the recommendations from LGBCE to its members within the local community of Oxshott and has reflected on the feedback provided by those members. The views contained in this response are therefore considered to represent a fair summary of the views of the community.
2. FEDORA has noted the three main considerations of LGBCE:
 - Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents.
 - Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity.
 - Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.

These are laudable objectives but they hide competing tensions and FEDORA has very genuine concern that, in dealing with the position of Oxshott, LGBCE has abandoned the second consideration at the expense of the other two considerations.
3. The present ward boundaries were set on well-argued grounds in 2005. These provide that a major part of Oxshott sits within the division of Hinchley Wood, Claygate & Oxshott with a small more geographically remote part sitting within the Cobham division. It is important to note that Oxshott, Hinchley Wood and Claygate are distinct communities based on defined villages. They are therefore very different in character from towns such as Cobham and Esher. The three settlements are linked not only by footpaths but also by the only railway line in the vicinity. The present arrangements work well. Oxshott has a clear identity, and, with a conscientious local SCC councillor, residents are satisfied that their interests are well represented.

LGBCE recommendations

4. By contrast, the recommendations from LGBCE provide for the dismemberment of the community by drawing an artificial line down the A244 and splitting the community between the two divisions of Cobham and Esher & Claygate. In addition, the identity of Oxshott is expunged from the map with no reference to its name in either of the two new divisions. FEDORA therefore considers that so far as concerns Oxshott, the recommendations fundamentally violate the second consideration of LGBCE by crudely trampling over community identity.

5. FEDORA acknowledges that the A3 acts as a divide within Elmbridge with Cobham & Downside and Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon to the south separated from settlements to the north of the A3. The projected elector numbers for 2029 are as follows::

Cobham & Downside	North	6,133	
	South	590	
	West	40	
	Total		6,763
Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon	East	2,831	
	South	1,003	
	West	3,487	
	Total		7,321
TOTAL			14,114

6. With a target number of electors of 11,911 and a variance of $\pm 10\%$ this produces a range of 10,720 to 13,102. Both Cobham & Downside and Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon individually fall below this range and combining all settlements sits above this range. FEDORA therefore appreciates the difficulties faced by LGBCE but it strongly believes that the recommendations are no more than an expediency that would be likely to create significant difficulty for residents of Oxshott. They would face the prospect of their community being split in two and losing their distinct community identity. In addition, they would suffer poorly defined and unclear representation within SCC.
7. FEDORA believes that although the present arrangements have some imperfections, they work well in practice. Most of the population sits within one division and Oxshott retains its identity. FEDORA therefore strongly argues in favour of retaining the present division of Hinchey Wood, Claygate & Oxshott.

Other options

8. It is appreciated that the retention of the existing boundaries would have knock on consequences within Elmbridge and that LGBCE might be minded to find these unworkable. In those circumstances, a solution needs to be found that results in preserving the identity of Oxshott with no division of the community and no loss of name. Creating Oxshott as a separate division would obviously be the most desirable outcome but it is appreciated that this would be so far below the lower limit that it would violate the principal of good electoral quality.
9. As an alternative solution, Oxshott could be combined with Cobham under the name of Cobham & Oxshott. Such a combination would reflect the fact that the two settlements are adjacent and to the south of the A3 albeit that they are of different sizes. However, the combined number of electors would be some 10% above the desirable upper limit and might therefore violate the principal of good electoral quality.
10. Finally, Oxshott could be combined with part of Esher/Claygate on a basis that respected good electoral quality and provided for retention of the name of Oxshott within the name of the new division.

Conclusion

11. By way of conclusion, FEDORA fundamentally rejects the recommendations of LGBCE for the way in which it proposes to treat Oxshott. As a community, Oxshott has a population of about 5,000+ people. It is a settlement that is largely defined by surrounding Green Belt with its own High Street, its own medical centre, its own schools, and its own station. There can be no justification for dividing the community particularly by arbitrarily drawing a line down a main road. And there can be no justification for the obliteration of the name of Oxshott in the LGBCE recommendations.
12. The recommendations accord to Oxshott an orphan status whose population can be conveniently carved up to suit LGBCE's arithmetical requirements. It sacrifices the concept of community and is frankly disrespectful to the residents of Oxshott. FEDORA therefore politely requests LGBCE to revise its recommendations on a basis that properly respects the second key consideration of LGBCE of "Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity".